

FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS; AND HOW THEY GREW.

BY MARGARET SIDNEY.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHICH TREATS OF A GOOD MANY MATTERS.

"PHOOH!" said Joel a few mornings after the emptying of the little brown house into the big one, when he and Van were rehearsing for the fiftieth time all the points of the eventful night, "phoooh! if I'd been here they wouldn't got away, I guess!"

"What would *you* have done?" asked Van, bristling up at this reflection on their courage, and squaring up to him. "What would you have done, Joel Pepper?"

"I'd a-pitched right into 'em—like—everything!" said Joel valiantly; "and a-caught 'em! Yes, every single one of the Bunglers!"

"The *what*?" said Van, bursting into a loud laugh.

"The Bunglers," said Joel with a red face. "That's what you said they were, anyway," he added positively.

"I said *Burglars*," said Van, doubling up with amusement, while Joel stood, a little sturdy figure, regarding him with anything but a sweet countenance.

"Well anyway, I'd a-caught 'em, so there!" he said, as Van at last showed signs of coming out of his fit of laughter, and got up and wiped his eyes.

"How'd you caught 'em?" asked Van, scornfully surveying the square little country figure before him. "You can't hit any."

"Can't?" said Joel, the black eyes flashing volumes, and coming up in front of Van. "You better believe I can, Van Whitney!"

"Come out in the back yard and try then," said Van hospitably, perfectly delighted at the prospect, and flying along towards the door. "Come right out and try."

"All right!" said Joel, following sturdily, equally delighted to show his skill.

"There," said Van, taking off his jacket, and flinging it on the grass, while Joel immediately fol-

lowed suit with his little homespun one. "Now we can begin perfectly splendid! I won't hit hard," he added patronizingly, as both boys stood ready.

"Hit as hard as you've a-mind too," said Joel, "I'm a-going to."

"Oh, *you* may," said Van politely, "because you're company. All right — now!"

So at it they went. Before very many minutes were over, Van relinquished all ideas of treating his company with extra consideration, and was only thinking how he could possibly hold his own with the valiant little country lad. Oh, if he could only be



JOEL SHOWS WHAT HE WOULD DO TO A BURGLAR.

called to his lessons — *anything* that would summon him into the house! Just then a window above their heads was suddenly thrown up, and his mamma's voice in natural surprise and distress called quickly: "Children what *are* you doing? Oh, Van, how could you!"

Both contestants turned around suddenly. Joel looked up steadily. "We're a-hitting, ma'am; he said I couldn't, and so we came out and —"

"Oh, Vanny," said Mrs. Whitney reproachfully, "to treat a little guest in this way!"

"I wanted to," said Joel cheerfully; "'twas great

fun. Let's begin again, Van!"

"We mustn't," said Van, readily giving up the charming prospect, and beginning to edge quickly towards the house. "Mamma wouldn't like it you know. He hits splendidly, mamma," he added generously, looking up. "He does really."

"And so does Van," cried Joel, his face glowing at the praise. "We'll come out every day," he added slipping into his jacket, and turning enthusiastically back to Van.

"And perhaps he *could* have pitched into the Burglars," finished Van, ignoring the invitation, and tumbling into *his* jacket with alarming speed.

"I *know* I could!" cried Joel, scampering after him into the house. "If I'd only a-been here!"

"Where's Ben?" said Van, bounding into the hall, and flinging himself down on one of the chairs. "Oh dear, I'm so hot! Say Joe, where *do* you s'pose Ben is?"

"I dunno," replied Joel, who didn't even puff.

"I saw him a little while ago with master Percy," said Jane, who was going through the hall.

"There now! and they've gone off somewhere," cried Van in extreme irritation, and flouncing up quickly. "I *know* they have. Which way did they go, Jane? And how long ago?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jane carelessly, "half an hour maybe; and they didn't go nowhere as I see, at least they were talking at the door, and I was going up stairs."

"Right here?" cried Van, and stamping with his foot to point out the exact place; "at *this* door, Jane?"

"Yes, yes," said Jane; "at that very door," and then she went into the dining-room to her work.

"Oh dear me!" cried Van, and flying out on the verandah, he began to peer wildly up and down the drive. "And they've gone to some splendid place, I know, and wouldn't tell us. That's just like Percy!" he added vindictively, "he's *always* a-stealing away! don't you see 'em, Joel? oh, do come out and look!"

"Taint any use," said Joel coolly, sitting down on the chair Van had just vacated, and swinging his feet comfortably; "they're miles away if they've been gone half an hour. *I'm* goin' up stairs," and he sprang up, and energetically pranced to the stairs.

"They aren't up *stairs*!" screamed Van, in scorn, bounding into the hall. "Don't go; I know that they've gone down to the museum!"

"The *what*?" exclaimed Joel, nearly at the top, peering over the railing. "What's that you said — what is it?"

"A *museum*," shouted Van, "and it's a perfectly *elegant* place, Joel Pepper, and Percy knows I like to go; and now he's taken Ben off; and he'll show him all the things! and they'll all be old when *I* take him — and — and — oh! I hope the snakes will bite him!" he added, trying to think of something bad enough.

"Do they have snakes there?" asked Joel, staring.

"Yes, they *do*," snapped out Van. "They have *everything*!"

"Well, they shan't bite *Ben*!" cried Joel in terror. "Oh! do you suppose they *will*?" and he turned right straight around on the stairs, and looked at Van.

"No," said Van, "they won't bite — what's the matter, Joe?"

"Oh, they *may*," said Joel, his face working, and screwing both fists into his eyes; at last he burst right out into a torrent of sobs. "Oh, don't let 'em Van — *don't*!"

"Why, they *can't*," said Van in an emphatic voice, running up the stairs to Joel's side, frightened to death at his tears. Then he began to shake his jacket sleeve violently to bring him back to reason. "Wait Joe! oh, do stop! oh, dear, what *shall* I do! I tell you, they *can't* bite," he screamed as loud as he could into his ear.

"You said — you — hoped — they — would," — said Joel's voice in smothered tones.

"Well, they *won't* anyway," said Van decidedly. "Cause they're all stuffed — so there now!"

"A'int they alive — nor nothin'?" asked Joel, bringing one black eye into sight from behind his chubby hands.

"No," said Van, "they're just as dead as anything, Joel Pepper — been dead years! and there's old crabs there too, old dead crabs — and they're just lovely! Oh, *such* a lots of eggs as they've got! And there are shells and bugs and stones — and an *awful* old crocodile, and —"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Joel, perfectly overcome at such a vision, and sitting down on the stairs to think. "Well, mamsie 'll know where Ben is," he said, springing up. "And then I tell you Van, we'll just tag 'em!"

"So *she* will," cried Van. "Why didn't we think

of that before? I *wanted* to think."

"I did," said Joel. "That was where I was goin'."

Without any more ado they rushed into Mrs. Pepper's big, sunny room, there to see, seated at the square table between the two large windows, the two lost ones bending over what seemed to be an object of the greatest importance, for Polly was hanging over Ben's shoulder with intense pride and delight, which she couldn't possibly conceal, and Davie was crowded as near as he could get to Percy's elbow.

Phronsie and little Dick were perched comfortably on the corner of the table, surveying the whole scene in quiet rapture; and Mrs. Pepper with her big mending basket, was ensconced over by the deep window seat just on 'the other side of the room, underneath Cherry's cage, and looking up between quick energetic stitches, over at the busy group, with the most placid expression on her face.

"*Oh!*—what you doin'?" cried Joel, flying up to them. "Let us see, *do* Ben!"

"What is it?" exclaimed Van, squeezing in between Percy and Ben.

"Don't"—began Percy. "There, see, you've knocked his elbow and spoilt it!"

"Oh no, he hasn't," said Ben, putting down his pencil, and taking up a piece of rubber. "There, see it all comes out—as good as ever."

"Isn't it just *elegant?*" said Percy in the most pleased tone, and wriggling his toes under the table to express his satisfaction.

"Yes," said Van, craning his neck to get a better view of the picture, now nearly completed, "it's perfectly splendid. How'd you do it, Ben?"

"I don't know," replied Ben with a smile, carefully shading in a few last touches. "It just drew itself."

"Tisn't anything to what he *can* do," said Polly, standing up as tall as she could, and beaming at Ben, "He used to draw most beautiful at home."

"Better than this?" asked Van, with great respect and taking up the picture, after some demur on Percy's part, and examining it critically. "I don't believe it, Polly."

"Phooh; he did!" exclaimed Joel, looking over his shoulder at a wonderful view of a dog in an extremely excited state of mind running down an interminable hill to bark at a locomotive and train of cars whizzing along a curve in the foreground. "Lots better 'n that! Ben can do *anything!*" he

added, in an utterly convincing way.

"Now give it back," cried Percy, holding out his hand in alarm. "I'm going to ask mamma to have it framed; and then I'm going to hang it right over my bed," he finished, as Van reluctantly gave up the treasure.

"Did you draw all the time in the little brown house?" asked Van, lost in thought. "How I wish I'd been there!"

"Mercy, no!" cried Polly with a little skip, turning away to laugh. "He didn't have hardly *any* time, and"—

"Why not?" asked Percy.

"Cause there was things to *do*," said Polly. "But sometimes when it rained, and he couldn't go out and work, and there wasn't anything to do *in* the house—then we'd have—oh!" and she drew a long breath at the memory, "such a time, you can't think!"

"Didn't you wish it would *always* rain?" asked Van, still gazing at the picture.

"Mercy, no!" began Polly.

"I didn't," broke in Joel, in horror. "I wouldn't a-had it rain for *anything!*—only once in a while," he added, as he thought of the good times that Polly had spoken of.

"'Twas nice outdoors," said little Davie, reflectively; "and nice inside, too." And then he glanced over to his mother, who gave him a smile in return. "And 'twas nice *always*."

"Well," said Van, returning to the picture, "I do wish you'd tell me how to draw, Ben. I can't do anything but flowers," he said in a discouraged way.

"Flowers aren't anything," said Percy, pleasantly. "That's girl's work; but dogs and horses and cars—those are just *good!*"

"Will you, Ben?" asked Van, looking down into the big blue eyes, so kindly turned up to his.

"Yes, *indeed* I will," cried Ben, "that is, all I know; 'tisn't much, but everything I can, I'll tell you."

"Then I can learn, can't I?" cried Van joyfully.

"Oh, tell me too, Ben," cried Percy, "will you? I want to learn too."

"And me!" cried Dick, bending forward, nearly upsetting Phronsie as he did so. "Yes, say I may, Ben, *do!*"

"You're too little," began Percy. But Ben nodded his head at Dick, which caused him to clap his hands and return to his original position, satisfied.

"Well, I guess we're goin' to, *too*," said Joel, "Dave an' me; there ain't anybody goin' to learn without *us*."

"Of course not," said Polly, "Ben wouldn't leave you out, Joey."

Phronsie sat quite still all this time, on the corner of the table, her feet tucked up under her, and her hands clasped in her lap, and never said a word. But Ben looking up, saw the most grieved expression

"Yes, the splendidest," said Ben, "the very splendidest pictures, Phronsie Pepper, you ever see!"

"*Oh!*" cried Phronsie; and before any one knew what she was about, she tripped right into the middle of the table, over the papers and everything, and gave a happy little whirl!

"Mercy, Phronsie!" cried Polly catching her up and hugging her; "You mustn't dance on the table."

"I'm a-going to learn," said Phronsie, coming out



PHRONSIE IS GOING TO LEARN TO DRAW, TOO.

settling on her face, as the large eyes were fixed in wonder on the faces before her.

"And there's my pet," he cried in enthusiasm, and reaching over the table, he caught hold of one of the little fat hands. "Why we couldn't think of getting along without *her*! She shall learn to draw—she *shall*!"

"*Really*, Bensie?" said Phronsie, the sunlight breaking all over the gloomy little visage, and setting the brown eyes to dancing. "Real, true, splendid pictures?"

of Polly's embrace, "to draw whole pictures, all alone by myself—Ben said so!"

"I know it," said Polly, "and then you shall draw one for mamsie—you shall!"

"I will," said Phronsie, dreadfully excited; "I'll draw her a cow, and two chickens, Polly, just like Grandma Bascomb's!"

"Yes," whispered Polly, "but don't you tell her yet till you get it done, Phronsie."

"I won't," said Phronsie in the loudest of tones—but putting her mouth close to Polly's ear. "And

then she'll be *so* s'prised, Polly! wont she?"

Just then came Jasper's voice at the door. "Can I come in?"

"Oh, do, Jappy," cried Polly, rushing along with Phronsie in her arms to open the door. "We're so glad you've got home!"

"So am I," said Jasper, coming in, his face flushed and his eyes sparkling; "I thought father never would be through down town, Polly!"

"We're going to learn to draw," said Percy, over by the table, who wouldn't on any account leave his seat by Ben, though he was awfully tired of sitting still so long, for fear somebody else would hop into it. "Ben's going to teach us."

"Yes, he is," put in Van, bounding up to Jasper and pulling at all the buttons on his jacket he could reach, to command attention.

"And us," said Joel, coming up too. "You forgot *us*, Van."

"The whole of us — every single one in this room," said Van decidedly, "all except Mrs. Pepper."

"Hulloa!" said Jasper, "that *is* a class! Well, Professor Ben, you've got to teach me then, for I'm coming too."

"*You?*" said Ben, turning around his chair, and looking at him; "I can't teach *you* anything, Jappy. You know everything already" —

"Let him come, anyway," said Polly, hopping up and down.

"Oh, I'm coming, Professor," laughed Jasper. "Never you fear, Polly; I'll be on hand when the rest of the class comes in!"

"And Van," said Mrs. Pepper, pausing a minute in her work, and smiling over at him in a lull in the chatter — "I think flowers are most beautiful!" and she pointed to a little framed picture on the mantel, of the bunch of buttercups and one huge rose that Van had with infinite patience drawn, and then colored to suit his fancy.

"Do you?" cried Van, perfectly delighted; and leaving the group he rushed up to her side. "Do you *really* think they're nice, Mrs. Pepper?"

"Of course I do," said Mrs. Pepper briskly, and beaming on him; "I think everything of 'em, and I shall keep 'em as long as I live, Van!"

"Well, then," said Van, very much pleased, "I shall paint you ever so many more — just as many as you want!"

"Do!" said Mrs. Pepper, taking up her work again. "An' I'll hang 'em every one up."

"Yes, I will," said Van; "and I'll go right to work on one to-morrow. What you mending our jackets for?" he asked abruptly, as a familiar hole caught his attention.

"Because the, 're tore," said Mrs. Pepper cheerfully, "an' they *won't* mend themselves."

"Why don't you let Jane?" he persisted. "She always does 'em."

"Jane's got enough to do," replied Mrs. Pepper smiling away as hard as she could, "and I haven't, so I'm a-goin' to look around and pick up somethin' to keep my hands out of mischief as much as I can, while I'm here."

"Do you ever get into mischief?" asked little Dick, coming up and looking into Mrs. Pepper's face wonderingly. "Why, you're a big woman!"

"Oh, mercy yes!" said Mrs. Pepper. "The bigger you be, the more mischief you can get into. You'll find *that* out, Dickey."

"And then do you have to stand in a corner?" asked Dick, determined to find out just what were the consequences, and reverting to his most dreaded punishment.

"No," said Mrs. Pepper laughing. "Corners is for little folks; but when people who know better, do wrong, there 'aint any corners they *can* creep into, or they'd git into 'em pretty quick!"

"I wish!" said little Dick, "you'd let me get into your lap. *That* would be a nice corner!"

"Do, mamsie," said Polly, coming up, "that's just the way I used to feel; and I'll finish the mending."

So Mrs. Pepper put down her work, and moved the big basket for little Dick to clamber up, when he laid his head contentedly back in her motherly arms with a sigh of happiness. Phronsie regarded him with a very grave expression. At last she drew near: "I'm tired; do, mamsie, take me!"

"So mamsie will," said Mrs. Pepper, opening her arms, when Phronsie immediately crawled up into their protecting shelter, with a happy little crow.

"Oh, now, tell us a story, Mrs. Pepper," cried Van; "*please, please* do!"

"No, no;" exclaimed Percy, scuttling out of his chair, and coming up, "let's talk of the little brown house. Do tell us what you used to do there — that's best."

"So 'tis!" cried Van; "ALL the nice times you used to have in it! Wait just a minute, do." And he ran back for a cricket which he placed at Mrs. Pepper's feet; and then sitting down on it, he leaned

on her comfortable lap, in order to hear better.

"Wait for me too, till I get a chair," called Percy, starting. "Don't begin till I get there."

"Here, let me, Percy," said Ben; and he drew forward a big easy-chair that the boy was tugging at with all his might.

"Now I'm ready, too," said Polly, setting small finishing stitches quickly with a merry little flourish, and drawing her chair nearer her mother's as she spoke.

"Now begin, please," said Van, "all the nice times you know."

"She couldn't tell *all* the nice times if she had ten years to tell 'em in, could she, Polly?" said Jasper.

"Well, in the first place then," said Mrs. Pepper, clearing her throat, "the little brown house had *got to be*, you know, so we made up our minds to make it just the *nicest* brown house that ever was!"

"And it *was*!" declared Jasper, with an emphatic ring to his voice. "The *very nicest place in the whole world*!"

"Oh dear," broke in Van enviously; "Jappy's always said so. I wish we'd been there, too!"

"We didn't want anybody but Jappy," said Joel, not very politely.

"Oh Joey, for shame!" cried Polly.

"Jappy used to bake," cried little Davie; "an' we all made pies; an' then we sat round an' ate 'em, an' then told stories."

"Oh what fun!" cried Percy. "Do tell us!"

So the five little Peppers and Jasper flew off into reminiscences and accounts of the funny doings. And Mrs. Pepper joined in heartily till the room got very merry with the glee and enthusiasm called forth; so much so, that nobody heard Mrs. Whitney knock gently at the door, and nobody answering, she was obliged to come in by herself.

"Well, well," she cried, merrily, looking at the swarm of little ones around Mrs. Pepper and the big chair. "You *are* having a nice time! May I come and listen?"

"Oh, if you will, sister," cried Jasper, springing off from his arm of the chair, while Ben flew from the other side, to hurry and get her a chair.

Percy and Van rushed too, knocking over so many things that they didn't help much; and little Dick poked his head out from Mrs. Pepper's arms when he saw his mamma sitting down to stay and began to scramble down to get into her lap.

"There now," said Mrs. Whitney, smiling over at Mrs. Pepper, who was smiling at her. "You have your baby, and I have mine! Now children, what's it all about? What has Mrs. Pepper been telling you?"

"Oh, the little brown house," cried Dicky, his cheeks all a-flame. "The *dearest* little house mamma! I wish I could live in one!"

"'Twouldn't be the same without the Peppers in it," said Jasper. "Not a bit of it!"

"And they had such perfectly *elegant* times," cried Percy, enviously, drawing up to her side. "Oh, you can't think, mamma!"

"Well now," said his mamma, "do go on, and let *me* hear some of the nice times."

So away they launched again, and Mrs. Whitney was soon enjoying it as hugely as the children, when a heavy step sounded in the middle of the room, and a voice spoke in *such* a tone that everybody skipped.

"Well, I should like to know what all this means! I've been all over the house, and not a trace of anybody could I find."

"Oh father!" cried Mrs. Whitney. "Van, dear, get up and get grandpa a chair."

"No, no!" said the old gentleman, waving him off impatiently. "I'm not going to stay; I must go and lie down. My head is in a bad condition to-day; very bad indeed," he added.

"Oh!" said Phronsie, popping up her head and looking at him. "I must get right down."

"What's the matter, Phronsie?" asked Mrs. Pepper, trying to hold her back.

"Oh, but I *must*," said Phronsie, energetically wriggling. "My poor sick man wants me, he *does*." And flying out of her mother's arms, she ran up to Mr. King, and standing on tiptoe, said softly, "I'll rub your head, grandpa dear, poor sick man; yes I *will*."

"And you're the best child," cried the old gentleman, catching her up and marching over to the other side of the room where there was a lounging chair. "There now, you and I, Phronsie, will stay by ourselves. *Then* my head will feel better."

And he sat down and drew her into his arms.

"Does it ache *very* bad?" said Phronsie, in a soft little voice. Then reaching up she began to pat and smooth it gently with one little hand, "*Very* bad, dear grandpa?"

"It won't," said the old gentleman, "if you only

keep on taking care of it, little Phronsie."

"Then," said the child, perfectly delighted, "I'm going to take all care of you, grandpa, *always!*"

"So you shall, so you shall!" cried Mr. King, no less delighted than she was. "Mrs. Pepper!"

"Sir?" said Mrs. Pepper, trying to answer, which she couldn't do very well surrounded as she was by the crowd of little chatterers. "Yes, sir; excuse me, what is it, sir?"

"We've got to come to an understanding about this thing," said the old gentleman, "and I can't talk much to-day, because my head won't allow it."

Here the worried look came into Phronsie's face again, and she began to try to smooth his head with *both* little hands.

"And so I must say it all in a few words as possible," he continued.

"What is it, sir?" again asked Mrs. Pepper, wonderingly.

"Well, the fact is, I've got to have somebody who will keep this house. Now Marian, not a word!" as he saw symptoms of Mrs. Whitney's joining in the conversation. "You've been good; just as good as can be under the circumstances; but Mason will be home in the fall, and then I suppose you'll have to go with him. Now *I*," said the old gentleman, forgetting all about his head, and straightening himself up suddenly in the chair, "am going to get things into shape, so that the house will be kept for all of us; so that we can come or go. And how can I do it better than to have the Peppers—you, Mrs. Pepper, and all your children—come here and live, and"—

"*Oh, father!*" cried Jasper, rushing up to him; and flinging his arms around his neck, he gave him such a hug as he hadn't received for many a day.

"Mercy on me, Jasper!" cried his father, feeling of his throat. "How can you express your feelings so violently! And, besides, you interrupt."

"Beg pardon, sir," said Jasper, swallowing his excitement, and trying to control his eagerness.

"Do you say yes, Mrs. Pepper?" queried the old gentleman impatiently. "I must get this thing fixed up to-day. I'm really too ill to be worried ma'am."

"Why sir," stammered Mrs. Pepper, "I don't

know *what* to say. I couldn't think of imposing all my children on you, and"—

"*Imposing!* Who's talking of *imposing!*" said Mr. King in a loud key. "I want my house kept; will you live here and keep it? That is the question."

"But sir," began Mrs. Pepper again, "you don't think"—

"I *do* think; I tell you, ma'am, I *do* think," snapped the old gentleman. "It's just because I *have* thought that I've made up my mind. Will you do it Mrs. Pepper?"

"What you goin' to do, mamsie?" asked Joel quickly.

"I don't know as I'm goin' to do *anything* yet,"



PHRONSIE COMFORTS HER POOR SICK MAN.

said poor Mrs. Pepper, who was almost stunned.

"To come here and live!" cried Jasper, unable to keep still any longer—and springing to the children. "Don't you want to, Joe?"

"*To live!*" screamed Joel. "Oh whickety, *yes!* "Do ma, do come here and live—do!"

"*To live!*" echoed Phronsie, over in the old gentleman's lap. "In this be-*yew*-ti-ful place? Oh, *oh!*"

"Oh, *mamsie!*" that was all Polly could say.

And even Ben had his arms around his mother's neck, whispering "Do" into her ear, while little Davie got into her lap and teased her with all his might.

"What *shall* I do!" cried the poor woman. "Did ever anybody see the like?"

"It's the very best thing you could possibly do," cried the old gentleman. "Don't you see it's for the children's advantage? They'll get such educations, Mrs. Pepper, as you want for them. And it accommodates me immensely. What obstacle can there be to it?"

"If I was only sure t'was best?" said Mrs. Pepper doubtfully.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Pepper," said Mrs. Whitney, laying her hand on hers. "Can you doubt it?"

"Then," said Mr. King, getting up, but still holding on to Phronsie, "we'll consider it settled. This is your home, children," he said, waving his hand at the five little Peppers in a bunch. And having thus summarily disposed of the whole business, he marched out with Phronsie on his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXV.

POLLY'S BIG BUNDLE.

Everything had gone wrong with Polly that day. It began with her boots.

Of all things in the world that tried Polly's patience most were the troublesome little black buttons that originally adorned those useful parts of her clothing, and that were fondly supposed to be there when needed. But they never were. The little black things seemed to be invested with a special spite, for one by one they would hop off on the slightest provocation, and go rolling over the floor, just when she was in her most terrible hurry, compelling her to fly for needle and thread on the instant. For one thing Mrs. Pepper was very strict about—and that was, Polly should do nothing else till the buttons were all on again, and the boots buttoned up firm and snug.

"Oh dear!" said Polly, sitting down on the floor, and pulling on her stockings. "There now, see that hateful old shoe, mamsie!" And she stuck out one foot in dismay.

"What's the matter with it?" said Mrs. Pepper straightening the things on the bureau. "You haint wore it out a-ready, Polly?"

"Oh no," said Polly, with a little laugh. "I hope not yet, but it's these dreadful *hateful* old buttons!" And she twitched the boot off from her foot with such an impatient little pull, that three or four more went flying under the bed. "There now—there's a lot more! I don't care! I wish they'd all go! they

might as well!" she cried, tossing that boot on the floor in intense scorn, while she investigated the state of the other one.

"Are they *all* off?" asked Phronsie, pulling herself up out of a little heap in the middle of the bed, and leaning over the side, where she viewed Polly sorrowfully. "*Every* one, Polly?"

"No," said Polly, "but I wish they were, mean old things! when I was going down to play a duet with Jasper! We should a-had a good long time before breakfast. Oh, mayn't I go just once, mamsie? Nobody'll see me if I tuck my foot under the piano; and I can sew 'em on afterwards—there'll be plenty of time. Do, just *once*, mamsie!"

"No," said Mrs. Pepper firmly, "there aint no time but *now*. And pianner playin' aint *very* nice when you've got to stick your toes under it to keep your shoes on."

"Well then," grumbled Polly, hopping around in



PHRONSIE HELPS POLLY.

her stocking-feet, "where *is* the work-basket, mamsie? Oh—here it is on the window-seat." A rattle of spools, scissors and necessary utensils showed plainly that Polly had found it, followed by a jumble of words and despairing ejaculations as she groped hurriedly under chairs and tables to collect the scattered contents.

When she got back with a very red face, she found Phronsie, who had crawled out of bed, sitting down on the floor in her little nightgown and examining the boot with profound interest.

"I can sew 'em, Polly," she said, holding up her hand for the big needle that Polly was trying to thread—"I can now truly; let me, Polly, do!"

"Mercy no!" said Polly with a little laugh, beginning to be very much ashamed. "What could you do with your little mites of hands a-pulling this big thread through that old leather? There, scamper

into bed again ; you'll catch cold out here."

" 'Tisn't *very* cold," said Phronsie, tucking up her toes under the nightgown, but Pollie hurried her into bed, where she curled herself up under the clothes, watching her make a big knot. But the knot didn't stay; for when Polly drew up the long thread triumphantly to the end — out it flew, and away the button hopped again as if glad to be released. And then the thread kinked horribly, and got all twisted up in disagreeable little snarls that took all Polly's patience to unravel.

"It's because you're in such a hurry," said Mrs. Pepper, who was getting Phronsie's clothes. And coming over across the room she got down on one knee, and looked over Polly's shoulder. "There now, let mother see what's the matter."

"Oh dear," said Polly, resigning the needle with a big sigh, and leaning back to take a good stretch, followed by Phronsie's sympathizing eyes; "they *never* 'll be on! And there goes the first bell!" as the loud sounds under Jane's vigorous ringing pealed up over the stairs. "There won't be time anyway, *now*! I wish there warn't such a thing as shoes in the world!" And she gave a flounce and sat up straight in front of her mother.

"*Polly*!" said Mrs. Pepper sternly, deftly fastening the little buttons tightly into place with quick, firm stitches, "better be glad you've got 'em to sew at all. There now, here they be. *Those* won't come off in a hurry!"

"Oh, mamsie!" cried Polly, ignoring for a moment the delights of the finished shoe to fling her arms around her mother's neck and give her a good hug. "You're just the splndidest, *goodest* mamsie in all the world. And I'm a hateful, cross old bear, so I am!" she cried remorsefully, buttoning herself into her boots. Which done, she flew at the rest of her preparations and tried to make up for lost time.

But 'twas all of no use. The day seemed to be always just racing ahead of her, and turning a corner, before she could catch up to it, and Ben and the other boys only caught dissolving views of her as she flitted through halls or over stairs.

"Where's Polly?" said Percy at last, coming with great dissatisfaction in his voice to the library door. "We've called her and called her, I guess a million and she *won't* hurry."

"What do you want to have her do?" asked Jasper, looking up from the sofa where he had flung himself with a book.

"Why, she said she'd make Van and me our sails you know," said Percy, holding up a rather forlorn looking specimen of a boat, but which the boys had carved with the greatest enthusiasm, "and we want her now."

"Can't you let her alone till she's ready to come?" said Jasper quickly. "You're always teasing her to do something," he added.

"I *didn't* tease," said Percy indignantly, coming up to the sofa, boat in hand, to enforce his words. "She said she'd *love* to do 'em, so there, Jasper King!"

"Coming! coming!" sang Polly over the stairs, and bobbing into the library, "Oh — here you are, Percy! I couldn't come before; mamsie wanted me. Now, says I, for the sails." And she began to flap out a long white piece of cotton cloth on the table to trim into just the desired shape.

"*That* isn't the way," said Percy, crowding up, the brightness that had flashed over his face at Polly's appearance beginning to fade. "Hoh! those won't be good for anything — those aint *sails*."

"I haven't finished," said Polly, snipping away vigorously, and longing to get back to mamsie. "Wait till they're done; then they'll be good — as good as can be!"

"And it's bad enough to have to *make* 'em," put in Jasper, flinging aside his book and rolling over to watch them, "without having to be found fault with every second, Percy."

"They're too big," said Percy, surveying them critically, and then looking at his boat.

"Oh, that corner's coming off," cried Polly cheerfully, giving it a sharp cut that sent it flying on the floor. "And they won't be too big when they're done, Percy, all hemmed and everything. There," as she held one up for inspection, "that's just the way I used to make Ben's and mine, when we sailed boats."

"Is it?" asked Percy, looking with more respect at the piece of cloth Polly was waving alluringly before him. "Just exactly like it, Polly?"

"Yes," said Polly, laying it down again for a pattern — "oh, how *does* this go — oh — that's it, there — yes, this is just *exactly* like Bensie's and mine — that was when I was ever so little; and then I used to make Joel's and Davie's afterwards and" —

"And were *theirs* just like this?" asked Percy, laying his hand on the sail she had finished cutting out.

"*Pre*-cisely," said Polly, with a pin in her mouth. "Just as like as two peas, Percy Whitney."

"Then I like 'em," cried Percy, veering round and regarding them with great satisfaction — as Van bounded in with a torrent of complaints, and great disappointment in every line of his face.

"Oh now, that's too bad!" he cried, seeing Polly fold up the remaining bits of cloth, and pick up the scraps on the floor. "And you've gone and let her cut out every one of 'em, and never told me a word! You're a mean, old hateful thing, Percy Whitney!"

"Oh *don't!*" said Polly, on her knees on the floor.

"I forgot —" began Percy, "and she cut 'em so quick — and —"

"And I've been waiting," said Van, in a loud wrathful key, "and waiting — and *waiting!*"

"Never mind, Van," said Jasper consolingly, getting off from the sofa and coming up to the table. "They're done and done beautifully, aren't they?" he said, holding up one.

But this only proved fresh fuel for the fire of Van's indignation.

"And you shan't have em, so!" he cried, making a lunge at the one on the table, "for I made most of the boat, *there!*"

"Oh no, you didn't!" cried Percy in the greatest alarm, hanging on to the boat in his hand. "I cut — all the keel — and the bow — and —"

"Mercy!" said Polly, in extreme dismay, looking at Jasper. "Come, I'll tell you what I'll do, boys."

"What?" said Van, cooling off a little, and allowing Percy to edge into a corner with the beloved boat and one sail. "What will you, Polly?"

"I'll make you another pair of sails," said Polly, groaning within herself as she thought of the wasted minutes, "and *then* you can see me cut 'em, Van."

"Will you *really*," he said, delight coming all over his flushed face.

"Yes, I will," cried Polly, "wait a minute till I get some more cloth." And she started for the door.

"Oh now, that's too bad!" said Jasper. "To have to cut more of those tiresome old things! Van, let her off!"

"Oh no, I won't! I won't!" he cried in the greatest alarm, running up to her as she stood by the door. "You *did* say so, Polly! You *know* you did!"

"Of course I did, Vanny," said Polly, smiling down into his eager face, "and we'll have a splendid pair in just — one — minute!" she sang.

And so the sails were cut out, and the hems turned down and basted, and tucked away into Polly's little work-basket ready for the sewing on the morrow. And then Mr. King came in and took Jasper off with him; and the two Whitney boys went up to mamma for a story; and Polly sat down in mamsie's room to tackle her French exercise.

(TO BE CONCLUDED.)

TWO LITTLE MAIDENS.

BY AGNES CARR.

A SORRY little maiden
Is Miss Fuss-and-Feather,
Crying for the golden moon,
Grumbling at the weather;
The sun will fade her gown,
The rain spoil her bonnet,
If she ventures out,
And lets it fall upon it.

A merry little maiden
Is Miss Rags-and-Tatters,
Chatting of the twinkling stars
And many other matters;
Dancing in the sunshine,
Pattering through the rain,
Her clothes never cause her
A single thought or pain.